

# Godly Offspring

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**Bible Verse:** Malachi 2:10-16  
**Preached on:** Sunday, April 28, 2024

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Thank you all for being here this morning. Of course, I was nervous when Pastor Don asked me to preach this farewell sermon and please understand this is very emotional for us. We love you dearly and it's a wrench to be leaving you. I come this morning ill-prepared in a sense, exhausted from all that we're dealing with so bear with me if I keep looking at my notes.

I contemplated and thought, what could I say this morning that would be helpful and instructive? And then I realized that, of course, one of the main reasons we're going back to Australia is we have a burden for our grandchildren; we want to have the opportunity and the time to have input into their lives. And as I look around the congregation this morning, my burden is for the precious children in our midst and for the parents that have the responsibility of raising them, and so what I want to share with you this morning comes from my heart out of a burden for you because the future of this church is in the children. And as I prepared, I reflected for a moment on what shaped me, what shaped me to be here this morning. Of course, I'm not putting myself up on a pedestal, but it is important to reflect on what God has done and how he provided and I realize that I am a reflection of my parents. I'm primarily a product of my parents so let me tell you a few brief details about my parents which are relevant to the instruction that we're going to have this morning.

My dad, Arthur Snelling, was the youngest of three children. His father left the family, walked out on the family when he was about three or four years old so I never met my paternal grandfather. My dad was raised by a single mother who worked very hard to provide for her family. Money was spent on the education of his older brother and his older sister, and when it came his turn, the money had run out. So he had to leave school when he was 15 years of age to get work and then the Second World War broke out and he enlisted in the Australian Army. He was sent, first of all, to Egypt to help the British fight the Germans in North Africa but then with the fall of Singapore, Australians were brought back to Australia. He turned 21 on a troop ship in the Indian Ocean. He was sent to redeploy to fight the Japanese in New Guinea, where he developed malaria and then chronic asthma. He was eventually demobilized and finished the war guarding the Navy docks in Sydney Harbour. He attended a nearby church and that's where he met my mum.

My mother, my mum, Gwen Brown, was also the youngest of three. The family lived in Sydney's prestigious eastern suburbs near the beaches. Her parents were strict and faithful church attenders. Her older brother studied to be a doctor, and he became a very well-respected specialist physician in downtown Sydney in the medical Prestige, the prestigious Prestige. You've heard of Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones. Well, he was a Harley Street specialist in London. That was the pinnacle. Well, my uncle was at that sort of pinnacle in Sydney. My mum started at university studying pharmacy but had to quit to marry my dad. In fact, her parents disowned her because they considered my dad was not good enough for her. So she had to sell her personal treasures to help fund their wedding and one of the older men in the church escorted her down the church aisle.

So why do I share this? It's because of the example that my parents set for me to follow. You see, they started married life with very little. They had to live with my dad's mother and his older sister and her husband until they could afford a house of their own. In post-war Australia, for a demobilized military, there was training, and he took up training as a plumber and a drainer. And he worked very hard. In those days, you had to dig the drains by hand with pick and shovel and he worked very hard to provide for our family, my older brother and I. My parents went through some very, very difficult financial times. Why? Because builders my father worked for went bankrupt and he didn't get paid for the work that he'd done. But, but I never heard one word of complaint, never any bitterness from either of my parents. They never discussed their hardships or burdens in front of my brother and I. They never criticized our pastor. They never criticized his sermons or our church leaders. They never said anything negative about our church family and our church. They both worked hard to raise us with family devotions, faithful church attendance and involvement, and actively involved in supporting us through education. And I mean about involvement, my mother went into labor with me on a Sunday afternoon when my father was out doing the equivalent of door-to-door work and she had to wait till he'd finished before they went to the hospital. I was born during the sermon on that Sunday night. Family was their priority. Church was their priority. My mother eventually won her parents back.

This brings us to our theme today, "Godly Offspring," raising godly offspring. God requires godly offspring from us. So how do we raise godly offspring, and I'm not just speaking to the parents here, I'm speaking to all of us because all of us have a part, whether we're young or old, single or married, we all have a part in impacting the children in our church. We all have a part in helping to raise godly offspring. Now please understand I cannot provide you with a formula or set of instructions that if you follow it will guarantee the outcome. Of course not. Of course not. Many claim Proverbs 22 verse 6 as a promise, but it's not a promise, it's simply a wise instruction. You know, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he's old he will not depart from it." That's not a promise, that's a wise instruction. We cannot guarantee the outcome. Yes, God does provide us instructions for family living but it's the Holy Spirit alone that does the work of sanctifying us, and he does the work of calling our children to our Lord. God alone is sovereign, and he alone chooses and calls.

You know, sadly, some children choose to resist no matter how good the parents have been to them. So, you know, it happens and I'm not criticizing. Remember, this is not aimed at anyone in particular here at all. Not criticizing at all or trying to make anyone feel guilty. We're laying out principles here in God's word. So I'm going to be frank this morning, very frank. Of course, I have the advantage that within a few weeks I'll be gone to Australia. But, you know, these things have to be said even if they make us uncomfortable. As I said before, I'm speaking generally, not to any of us specifically. Our past is behind us, as I've reminded some of you recently. Yes, there's things in the past that we regret but, you know, since we've come to Christ, his blood has covered all that. The past is gone. We don't have to be dragged down by the past. We're talking about what do we do here today and into the future? What does God's word say to us about how we should behave today in our families, in our church, and into the future? You see, God has forgiven us through Christ, our past; we don't have to let that weigh us down. Yes, things have happened in the past that we regret, but we don't have to let that weigh us down.

So our passage this morning, if you'd like to turn to Malachi chapter 2, you know, go to the book of Matthew and go one back into the Old Testament, the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi chapter 2, and I'm going to read from verse 10 through to verse 16, and here we find the reference to God's requiring of us to produce godly offspring. Malachi chapter 2, verses 10 to 16.

10 Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? 11 Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. 12 May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts! 13 And this second thing you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. 14 But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. 15 Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. 16 "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."

The key verse for us here today is verse 15, "Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring." See, why did God establish marriage in the first place when he established it between Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? He wanted them to have godly offspring. After Adam and Eve were created, he put them in the Garden of Eden and he commanded them, we read

about that in Genesis 1:28, "And God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.'" Now, of course, this was crucially important after the Fall, after Adam and Eve had sinned and were cast out of the Garden of Eden. Why? Because God had promised that there would come a Redeemer from the seed of the woman to deliver man from the curse, and we read about that in Genesis 3:15 when God spoke to Satan, the serpent, what did God say? "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel."

So, it was important that there were godly offspring because there needed to be a godly line to fulfill God's promise of the Redeemer that would come, and it was so important that Adam and Eve raised godly offspring who would carry forward God's purposes through their subsequent descendants, and of course, that's why God repeated it to Noah and his three sons when they got off the ark. In Genesis 9, verse 1, we read, "And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.'" And so subsequently, of course, God chose Abraham. He was narrowing down his purposes in creating a godly line now through Abraham who was called, and out of Abraham arose the nation of Israel, God's people. They were to perpetuate as a nation by faithful obedience to God and sincerely worshiping and serving him by producing godly offspring that would ensure the continuity of God's promises to them and eventually to the Gentiles through the coming Redeemer. But what happened? As we read in our reading here this morning from Malachi, throughout their history, God's people waxed and waned in their faithfulness and obedience to God. They waxed and waned in their worship and serving of him. And so here again, near the end of the Old Testament era, we have the prophet Malachi speaking up again to rebuke the remnant of God's people in Judah for their faithlessness to God; without godly offspring, the line to the promised Redeemer would be broken. Of course, similarly, from a human perspective, we could say that the church is just one generation away from extinction. One generation away from extinction. However, we take comfort that Jesus declared that he would build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it, Matthew 16 verse 18. So God has promised there will always be a godly remnant, but, but God still requires and commands us and expects us to raise godly offspring.

So, how do we raise godly offspring? Well, this morning we're going to consider three crucial scriptural principles. But first, let's look at the context here in Malachi 2, verses 10 to 16. So if we read verses 10 and 11 again, what do we read? Judah had profaned God's covenant with them. "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god." You see, Judah, the people of Judah, the men of Judah had been faithless by marrying unbelievers, the daughters of foreign gods, and then with these foreign wives had gone to the sanctuary of the Lord to present their offerings and that was an abomination to the Lord, verse 12. They had profaned the covenant made with their fathers by the one true God, the Creator, the one who created us. The offerings were to be brought to and made in the sanctuary of the Lord with obedience and repentant

hearts and lives but God's people were disobeying his commandments, his commandment of marriage, to be with believers only and thus to produce godly offspring, raise godly children.

So their offerings were an abomination to him and to his sanctuary, and the Lord was rightly angry. Verse 12, "May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts!" You know, Jesus also echoed this in Matthew chapter 5, verses 23 and 24. He warned about arrogant disobedience. He said, "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." The men of Judah had failed miserably to follow God's commandments and yet they'd gone to the sanctuary with their offerings unrepentant of their failure to keep the commandments, God's commandments in obedience. And what happened? We read in verse 13, they were upset that the Lord did not accept their offerings. What arrogance! What did God say through Malachi verse 13? "And this second thing you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand."

You see, they were tearful and weeping and groaning at and over the altar because they knew in their rebellious hearts that God was not accepting their offerings or hearing their prayers, but here in this passage there's an additional reason why God was not accepting their offerings. Verse 14, "But you say, 'Why does he not?' Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless." Notice that's repeated, that expression, "guard yourselves in your spirit and do not be faithless." You see, these men of Judah, what had they done? They were unfaithful to the wives of their youth. They had divorced them, given up their marriages by covenant as witnessed by God. Remember it says here that a portion of God's Spirit is part of that union. When God makes two one, the Holy Spirit is involved as well. And they'd broken that covenant. They had cast aside and were faithless to the wives of their youth so they could marry these foreign women. No wonder God was angry because that was totally contrary to God's commandments. As God says here, he hates divorce.

So this brings us to the first of our God-given principles for God's people to raise godly offspring: each husband, point number one, each husband must love and be faithful to the wife of his youth. That's what we read in Malachi 2:15, "Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth." As I said before, the Holy Spirit was involved in the joining of two to make one. So how can a portion of God's Spirit be in a marriage union unless the young

man and his wife are both believers? Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 6, verses 14 to 16, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?"

You know, what astounds me is how easily some forget their marriage vows. When we stand and make our marriage vows to one another, we promise and make those promises to one another before God. God is our witness. And what do we promise? "For better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness or in health, until death do us part." We make a lifelong promise to one another with God as our witness. No wonder God hates divorce, because it is the breaking of our marriage promise to him. It is a breaking apart of what God has done when the two cleave together and become one flesh in marriage as designed and commanded by God in the Garden of Eden. That was his pattern and plan for marriage, one man with one woman for life.

Now I hesitate to say this, but it needs to be said. We often wonder, how did the moral slide in our culture begin? How did we get to all this mess fighting over abortion and homosexuality and gender confusion? Now, I can't be dogmatic, but my observation is that it started with easy, no-fault divorces. It cheapened marriage between a man and a woman for life. It meant that marriage wasn't sacred, it could easily be tossed aside. It produced children without fathers as role models. Now people could choose to follow their passions and lusts, cohabit with and marry whoever they liked. And why should they recognize their God-given gender? They could choose to do whatever gender they felt like. That was bad enough in the culture but, friends, what I found when I first began to observe what was going on in the church in America, and it's happening in Australia as well, so don't get me wrong, easy divorce found its way into the church. Now, of course, please don't misunderstand me; I know that divorce happens for unfortunate reasons. I get that. I get that and I'm not trying to hurt anyone who's been through that process at all. Not at all. But too often, you know, with this idea of easy divorce, people look for an easy way out instead of working through their difficulties, communicating and working through the tough times. So I'm not pointing any fingers at anyone. Remember what I said before? What happened in our past has been covered by Christ's blood. We're talking about here today and looking forward.

Even Jesus said in Mark chapter 10, and Pastor Nathaniel has covered this, verses 2 to 9, even Jesus said, "because of your hardness of heart, he," that is speaking of Moses, "wrote you this commandment," a commandment that allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce. Okay, Jesus said, it happens. However, Jesus went on to say, "but from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female, therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What God therefore has joined together, let no man separate." Notice that? What God has joined together in marriage let no man separate. Do you realize that? God brought you together in your marriages. You thought you were attracted by that young lady. No, God was bringing you together. And notice that Jesus was quoting from both Genesis chapter 1 and Genesis chapter 2 at the same time.

So, what is God's standard for men in marriage? Well, let's turn to Ephesians chapter 5. Chapter 5, and let's read verses 25 to 33, very familiar verses that have been covered previously from this pulpit but we need to be reminded in this context this morning. Verse 25, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. 'Therefore,'" see, Paul quotes again, "'a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

What a lofty standard, men, one that we cannot attain to without God's help by his Holy Spirit. We are to love our wives as Christ loved the church and how did Christ love the church? He died for the church. He shed his blood. And we're told that it starts, a man loving his wife, it starts, we love our wives as we love our own bodies, verse 29, "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church." We're talking, men, about sacrificial love. We're talking about serving love, self-sacrifice love. Do any of us attain to that? Don't ask Kim. She'll tell you I'm not perfect. But men, are we prepared to die for our wives just as Christ died for the church, his bride? Do we love our wives that we encourage them and help them and teach them so that they become without spot and wrinkle and blemish just as Christ does the church? And of course, we're reminded here in this passage that when a husband loves and respects his wife like that, she will in return love and respect him, and they do so in front of the children and set an example to the children. I've heard it said that the best way for fathers to help their children is to love their mothers. I'll repeat that. The best way for fathers to help their children is to love their mothers.

Well, that brings us to our second point this morning: our examples, men, as the leader and our behavior in our home and in our church because it applies to wives as well. Their example by behavior at home and in the church. It's not just in the home, it's our behavior in the church. You see, our children copy and imitate us. They repeat what we say and what we do. That's why I told you about my parents because you can see that reflection in my commitment to the local church, in my commitment to the family, because that's what they did. They trained me and raised me like that. By the way, ask any schoolteacher. Kim would often tell me about some of the children in her classroom, and the ones that were disrespectful and argumentative, guess what? She knew that when their parents came for the parent teacher interview, the parents would be disrespectful and argumentative. And that was always 100% correct. You see, beloved, and that applies not just to parents, it applies to all of us in the church, our behavior and our example to all these little ones in our midst shapes them, shapes them.

So fathers and mothers, we need to be examples to our children, both in our homes and also in the church. Paul reminded us in 1 Corinthians 11 verse 1, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ." And so Paul reminds us here in Ephesians chapter 6 verse 4, of the responsibility of fathers. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Note that fathers are meant to be fair and just with their children so they do not provoke them to anger, but discipline them lovingly. Yes, discipline them, but lovingly, graciously. And also to instruct them about God, his commandments, and ultimately the gospel itself. You know, Moses had already given these details to the fathers of Israel, what constituted the instruction of the Lord, and we read about that in Deuteronomy chapter 6 verses 4 through 7, very familiar verses. Let me read them. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words," these words, "that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up." You know, Jesus repeated the same commandment, didn't he, the one I just read in verse 5 of Deuteronomy chapter 6. We read in Matthew 22, verses 37 and 38. Jesus said, "And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.'"

So fathers, we are to lovingly discipline and teach our children. We're to instruct them. We're to set an example to them and that's not easy, is it? Is it? Our actions can sometimes speak louder than our words and, you know, if our actions don't follow and match our words, our children see that and that ruins the example we're trying to set them. But mothers also play an invaluable strategic role in instructing and influencing their children, but we read in Ephesians chapter 5, Paul makes it clear that mothers are to be under the leadership and headship of their husbands. Wives are to lovingly submit to their husband's leadership. Well, they can do that easily if their husbands are loving them sacrificially. It's not a hard task for a wife to submit to a husband if the husband is loving her sacrificially. And what do we read in verse 22 of Ephesians chapter 5, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything," in everything, "to their husbands."

As I said before, that's not difficult for wives to do if their husbands love them sacrificially but what is the reason God gives for the husband being the head of the wife? Well, he says here, it's just as Christ is the head of the church. That's the role model. Just as Christ is the head of the church, his bride, the husband is to the head of his bride, his wife. But there are additional reasons given, Paul gives in 1 Timothy chapter 2 verses 11 to 14. 1 Timothy chapter 2 verses 11 to 14. "Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." We don't like to talk about this verse very often because it can be a very touchy subject, but God has given us the reasons why he declared the husband to have the leadership role, and that generally

women should not be leaders or have authority over men. They shouldn't be teaching men in churches, and I say this very cautiously, or in Christian ministries either. Women should not be in authority or teach men even in Christian ministries. Why? 1) Adam was formed first, and 2) Eve was deceived by Satan. Adam wasn't. But we'll get to Adam in a minute, guys. Okay? We've got to stop blaming Eve. You see, the consequence of Eve being deceived, she tried to rule over her husband, didn't she, when she gave Adam the fruit? Adam, of course, was at fault because he accepted that, didn't he? You see, Adam could have said to Eve, "No, I won't eat the fruit because that's breaking God's commandment." So guys, stop blaming Eve. Adam, in Adam all men die. Adam is the one who sinned.

But what did God declare to Eve as a consequence? We read in Genesis chapter 3, verse 16, "To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.'" Of course, Adam didn't get off lightly either. As I said before, he could have chosen to follow God's commandment. Instead, he accepted Eve's leadership over him and took of that fruit. So don't blame Eve. Adam is the one that was at fault there. And what did God say to Adam? "Because," in Genesis 3:17 to 19, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Notice, we suffer from the curse because of Adam, not because of Eve. Yet, here we read God in Genesis gives us the foundation for the doctrine of male headship in marriage, in the family and in the leadership in the church. That foundation was given by God. It's not the whim of men who are trying to overrule women. Not at all. It was given by God and therefore it is binding on us no matter what the culture says and does. You know, the tragedy is that the rise of feminism in our culture has infiltrated our churches and even Christian ministries and that comes with consequences because it's disobedience to God's clear instructions.

Okay, it needs to be emphasized, though, that in God instructing male headship and leadership, he was not mandating unloving dictatorship that mistreats wives and women. On the contrary, as we've already said, a husband must be a sacrificial, loving and serving leader with Christ as example. What did Jesus do? He washed the feet of his disciples. Furthermore, a wise husband recognizes his wife is his co-equal in standing before God, and therefore she has abilities and insights that he may not have. So a wise husband will listen to his wife, and yet he will make the decisions. You see, children grow up with their parents as role models. What role models are we setting our children? How will children treat their mother if their father is unlovingly dictatorial with their mother and with them? Of course, that's provoking the children to anger, isn't it? Now on the contrary, children look to their parents as role models. Often, a son learns how to treat a future wife by watching how his father treats his mother and guess what? It's no surprise that often he will look for a young lady who's like his mother. Similarly, daughters look to their fathers as role models. They learn how their father treats their mother, how their

mother submits to their father, and so when she looks for a young man, often she will look for a husband who follows the example of her father. You see, friends, that's why I'm saying this, because it sets the trajectory for future generations. What we do today by our example in our home and in the church affects our children for eternity. Remember what I said before, following these instructions doesn't guarantee that our children, our offspring will be godly. No, because they're willful sinners just like we were once. Sometimes our children will resist God's grace and mercy. That's why we pray for our children.

Now, here's a touchy issue. A husband's behavior towards his wife and family in the home should then be reflected in his behavior in the church. In the church. Now, again, I'm walking on touchy territory here but over the last eight years as an elder in this church, I've observed the families that have left this church. Yes, some have had to leave because of work or family. Of course, I get that, that's what we're doing. But I can honestly say from observation that in the majority of the families that have left, the wife has been the head of the marriage. The wife made the decision to leave, not the husband. And you know what that does? It affects the children who are watching. If the parents are critical of the church and its leaders in front of their children, what are the children going to think? "Oh, it's okay. I can leave church. I can be critical of the leaders. I can be critical of the church." They're moving somewhere else and before you know it, when they're old enough, they'll leave the church altogether because of the example that they've been set. And I'd add here, by the way, men, it's all too easy to behave one way at home and then put on a good face at church. Remember, God sees. That's why I always keep reminding myself, "God sees everything. He knows everything I do. He knows everything I think." No wonder it says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. He knows. We cannot hide in being dictatorial at home and then coming to church and being all lovey-dovey. We have to be consistent in the home and in the church because our children see that inconsistency and it gives them the right to therefore be inconsistent in their behavior.

What did God say to the children of Israel in Exodus 20 verses 5 and 6? "I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." You see, friends, this matters. It matters to the eternal destiny of our children, our behavior, our example, men leading their wives lovingly, sacrificially, wives submitting to their husbands, being consistent in the home and being consistent in the church which brings me to my third and final point: your family must worship together. If we want to raise godly offspring, our families need to worship together. It's been said that the family that worships together and prays together stays together. I'll repeat that. The family that worships together and prays together stays together.

Friends, we don't separate our children in our activities in our home. We eat meals together. We do vacations together. We do life together. So why should it be any different in the church family? And that's why here at TCC, we have the children in the services, worshipping with us, praying with us, and hearing the teaching and preaching. So

our philosophy of ministry includes children in our services, worship and learning with their parents. They receive the same instruction. And you know, friends, parents know, then, what their children are learning and hearing, and they can build on that in the instruction in their homes. And it never ceases to amaze me and surprise me what little children learn; sometimes they learn more from the sermon than their parents do.

So as set out in our philosophy of children's ministry, which is available on our TCC website, let me remind you what God's pattern was with children and their instruction. First of all, in the Old Testament, what do we read? When Moses went before Pharaoh, "Let my people go," in Exodus chapter 10, verses 8 to 9, we read, "So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh. And he said to them, 'Go, serve the LORD your God. But which ones are to go?'" And what was Moses' answer? "Moses said, 'We will go with our young and our old. We will go with our sons and daughters and with our flocks and herds, for we must hold a feast to the LORD.'" And then the Passover occurred and what was God's instructions through Moses? In Exodus chapter 12, and it's repeated in Exodus chapter 13, "when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?'" speaking of the Passover, "you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And then, of course, the Ten Commandments. Were the Ten Commandments just given to husbands and wives, to men and women? No. They were present when God gave the Ten Commandments, when Moses brought the Ten Commandments, because the commandments apply to the children as well. How would they not heed those commandments unless they were aware of them being instructed in them? And what do we read in Exodus chapter 20 verses 4 to 6, 9 to 10 and 12, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." Then, of course, the commandment to work for six days and rest for one, "On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter." And what were the children to do? ""Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you." And what did Moses tell the children of Israel when they got into the land? He told them in Deuteronomy 31 that they were to remind themselves of God's commandments. "Assemble the people, men and women," we read in Deuteronomy 31, "and little ones, the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan." See, how could the children hear those promises unless they were present always in their gatherings?

And so what did Joshua do? He did exactly as Moses had commanded. We read about that in Joshua chapter 8. Remember, they set up half the tribes on Mount Ebal and half the tribes on Gerizim, they had blessings and the curses and what do we read? "There was

not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel," and what did the assembly of Israel include, "and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them." Fast forward to King Jehoshaphat when he called the people for a national feast. We read in 2 Chronicles chapter 20, "And Judah assembled to seek help from the LORD; from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD. Meanwhile all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children." Go over to Ezra, further on in the Old Testament history and what do we read? In Ezra chapter 10, "While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children, gathered to him out of Israel, for the people wept bitterly." And also in Nehemiah chapter 8, verse 2, "So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand," all who could understand, "on the first day of the seventh month."

So whenever the people of God gathered together, the children were always present, always present to hear God's word with the adults. Well, the pattern continues in the New Testament. Pastor Nathaniel preached on this just the other Sunday in Mark chapter 10. What happened? Jesus was teaching, "And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.' And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them." So this text reminds us what Jesus' disposition was to the presence of children. He welcomed them. He held them. He blessed them. The disciples had treated them as a nuisance, an unwelcome distraction. We read similarly in Luke chapter 18, verses 15 to 17, "Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.'" So the humble pretension found in children must mark the faith of any who wish to enter the kingdom of God. As Jesus said in Matthew 18, the disciples asked him, "'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.'"

So children were always present when Jesus taught the crowds and he welcomed them. And finally, what about in the apostolic era, in the New Testament church? Well, Paul's letters were read publicly in worship. So we read in Colossians 4:16, "And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea." How would the children have heard Paul's instructions if they weren't present in the worship service when the letters were being read? I mean, we read here in Ephesians chapter 6, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." And

similarly we read in Colossians 3 verse 20, "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases God." I mean, how could the children have heard those instructions when Paul's letters were read, if they weren't present in the worship service, worshiping with their parents, rather than being separated for some other instruction?

As I said before, it never ceases to surprise me what children learn in services. I've got a colleague who was sharing with me recently about her four and a half year old son who sits with them through the sermons. He said to her, "Mommy, I don't want to be lost." And then she asked him what he meant and he explained. "Well," she said to him, "how do you make sure you're not lost?" And he recited the whole gospel. He understood, a four and a half year old. See, when I was five years of age, I was expected to sit in the service, undistracted, listening to the sermon. Now, of course, it varies with age. Don't get me wrong and I'm not trying to put anyone on a guilt trip. But children learn from the preaching of God's word, as I said before, often they learn more than their parents.

Well, let me sum up as we close. A lot of heavy material this morning, challenging, thought-provoking. But what instructions do we find in God's word for raising godly offspring that God's requires of us as parents? Well, each husband, number one, each husband must love and be faithful to the wife of his youth. Sacrificial love, servant love, faithfulness. Secondly, we learn our examples in the home and in the church. Husbands are to be loving leaders, sacrificially loving their wives, not provoking their children, but instructing them in God's commandments and God's ways. Wives are to be submissive to their husbands. And both husbands and wives need to reflect the same behavior in the church and be consistent with their behavior in the home. And finally, our families need to worship together. Worship together. And friends, that's why every one of us in this church body has an impact on the children in our midst. I just love to see the children here and the way that the children can come up and talk to me or any other adult because we're setting a model, we're setting an example for them to follow, all of us are in our behavior in the church. That's what God has instructed for us to worship together as one big church family. Well, may God help us as parents to raise godly offspring because we're talking about the eternal destiny of our children. We want our children and their children and their children to grow up to love the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their mind, and to serve the same Lord that we love and serve ourselves.

Let's bow for a word of prayer.

*Father, we plead your help this morning. We've dug into some challenging issues that confront us to the core in how we should behave in our families and in our church and yet, Father, you have promised to be with us by your Spirit, and you are, you've made us new creatures in Christ, the one who set the supreme example. Help us, Father, to submit to our loving Lord and Savior and learn to be examples to our wives and to our children in the home and in the church, Father, because you require that our children are raised to be godly offspring. Help us, we pray. We plead your help. We know that we cannot do it in our own strength, none of us. Yes, we've been renewed by the washing of the water and the word but, Father, we still struggle with our sinfulness and that's why we need to*

*submit to you and to the prompting of your Holy Spirit. So be with us, we pray, and help us from this day forward to live lives that are examples to our children and our grandchildren and those who will come, that, Father, you will be pleased when we enter into the joy of our Lord, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." We pray all this in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*